

Media Note
Office of the Spokesman
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NEW PASSPORT INITIATIVE ANNOUNCED TO BETTER SECURE AMERICA'S BORDERS

Initiative Designed to Expedite Travel in the Western Hemisphere While Enhancing Security

The Departments of State and Homeland Security announced today the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative to secure and expedite travel. The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require all U.S. citizens, Canadians, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, and citizens of Mexico to have a passport or other accepted secure document to enter or re-enter the U.S. by January 1, 2008.

Currently, U.S. citizens, and some citizens of other countries in the Western Hemisphere are not required to present a passport to enter or re-enter the U. S. when traveling within the Western Hemisphere. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA, also known as the 9/11 Intelligence Bill), signed into law on December 17, 2004, mandated that the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, develop and implement a plan to require U.S. citizens and foreign nationals to present a passport, or other secure document when entering the United States.

To provide vital information to the general public, the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State (DOS) are issuing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on the plan to the public and requesting input and/or comment on the suggested documents and possible alternative documents that can meet the statutory requirements. A more formal rulemaking will be issued later this year following review of those comments to implement the first phase of the initiative. This rulemaking will take into account comments received from the advanced notice as well as soliciting further comments on the rulemaking itself.

“Our goal is to strengthen border security and expedite entry into the United States for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors,” Homeland Security Acting Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security, Randy Beardsworth stated. “By ensuring that travelers possess secure documents, such as the passport, Homeland Security will be able to conduct more effective and efficient interviews at our borders.”

“We recognize the implications this might have for industry, business and the general public, as well as our neighboring countries, and they are important partners in this initiative. The advanced notice of proposed rule making will allow these affected publics to voice concern and provide ideas for alternate documents acceptable under

the law,” explained Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Maura Harty. “The overarching need is to implement this legal requirement in a way that strengthens security while facilitating the movement of persons and goods.”

DHS and DOS propose to roll out the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to acquire the necessary documents before the deadline.

As previously noted, the passport (U.S. or Foreign) will be the document of choice for entry or re-entry into the U.S. However, another document that we anticipate will be acceptable under the travel initiative is the Border Crossing Card, (BCC - or “laser visa”). Currently, the BCC serves in lieu of a passport and a visa for citizens of Mexico traveling to the U.S. from contiguous territory. Other documents that we anticipate will be acceptable under this Initiative are the Customs and Border Protection Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI), NEXUS and Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program cards.

Additional documents are also being examined to determine their acceptability for travel. The public will be notified of additional travel document options as those determinations are made. The government would expect that acceptable documents must establish the citizenship and identity of the bearer, enable electronic data verification and checking, and include significant security features. Ultimately, all documents used for travel to the U.S. are expected to include biometrics that can be used to authenticate the document and verify identity.

For more information, visit
www.travel.state.gov <<http://www.travel.state.gov>>
www.dhs.gov <<http://www.dhs.gov>>

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